

**MARYLAND GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON
MIDDLE EASTERN AMERICAN AFFAIRS**

Meeting Minutes

Date: Tuesday December 9, 2008

Time: 2:30 pm – 4:00 pm

Place: Miller Senate Building
Schweinhaut Conference Room
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis Maryland

Present: Chair Anwer Hasan, Rudwan Abu-rumman, Bilal M. Ayyub,
Zahid H. Bukhari, Miriam Galston, Irma Hafeez, Majid R. Mirza,
Rafi Rone, Nadian Sawaya, Julian Spierer, Ibrahim Uyar

Absent: Riad Dakheel M.D., Didi Elmenshawy, Khalil A. Zaied

Staff Present: Iman Awad

Guests: Farzaneh Riar

I. Call to Order and Greetings

The meeting was called to order at 2:30 p.m. by Chair Anwer Hasan. Chair Hasan welcomed the Commissioners, staff and guest. Chair Hasan mentioned the good turnout of Commissioners to an event held at the Jewish Community Center on Monday December 8th to support the victims of the Mumbai attacks. Commissioner Irma Hafeez suggested that information be sent out earlier so more Commissioners can come and support the larger community. Commissioner Miriam Galston further suggested to contact Lily Qi of Montgomery County in order to avoid duplicating information. The minutes for the last meeting were unavailable and due to the limited amount of time Chair Hasan wanted to move straight to the agenda.

II. GOCI Staff Update

Special Assistant Iman Awad updated the Commission on what has been done since the last meeting in October. She scheduled a meeting with the Equal Employment Opportunity coordinator Glynis Watford to address the issues concerning Middle Easterners in the state workforce. It was suggested that the Commission follow up with the office to assist in developing a portion of their diversity training to include Middle Easterners. For the Community Development committee there was a conference call held between Commissioner Nadia Sawaya, Executive of the Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs David Lee, and Special Assistant

Awad to discuss the possibility of a health conference. During this call a rough program of the conference was drafted. Special Assistant Awad also met with Jane Traynham of the Maryland Department of Planning to discuss the upcoming 2010 Census.

III. Business Development

Chair Hasan first mentioned that the database for Middle Eastern businesses in Maryland and the Greater Washington Metropolitan area has been growing and those people with information should forward it to Special Assistant Awad to add to the database. Commissioner Irma Hafeez suggested that there be a link on the website to allow business themselves to register for the database. Commissioner Bilal Ayyub further suggested to use the Washingtonian which provides a detailed list of Middle Eastern physicians which can be added. Chair Hasan suggested using this database as a guide for the Business and Professional Conference being held in April 2009.

Chair Hasan moved the discussion toward planning for the April 2009 Business and Professional Conference. First order of business is to establish a volunteer committee to help with the logistics of the event. The community has been contacted and the committee is growing. Chair Hasan suggested the Commissioners reach out to people they know for more help. Chair Hasan wants to involve the embassies in this event in order to provide a forum to discuss how to do business in the Middle East. Chair Hasan also wants to create a magazine to send to sponsors about the event, the event will need a sufficient number of sponsors to pay for the event. Commissioner Rafi Rone informed Chair Hasan that he will help provide names for the committee.

Commissioner Rudwan Abu-rumman asked if it was okay for a Commissioner to purchase a table for their own business at the conference. Chair Hasan said he did not think that would be a problem and asked Special Assistant Awad to follow up on this request. The Commission also began discussing potential locations for the event. Chair Hasan mentioned the BWI Marriott where the Hispanic Commission held the Hispanic Business Conference. Commissioner Rone suggested the Hilton located by the Inner Harbor, Commissioner Majid Mirza mentioned the Best Western in Baltimore, and Commissioner Ayyub suggested the Riggs Center at the University of Maryland College Park campus. Special Assistant Awad was asked to follow up with all locations.

Commissioner Farzaneh Riar mentioned that Community Centers had databases to distribute information to their communities and suggested sending information via these databases for more support. Chair Hasan moved the discussion to the establishment of a sister state with Abu Dhabi. There needs to be an active committee established to make a sustainable relationship with Abu Dhabi. The President of the University of Maryland is somebody who should be contacted for this committee. Commissioner Zahid Bukhari and Commissioner Hafeez asked Chair Hasan to clarify the role of the committee. Chair Hasan explained that the Commission promotes the relationship with Abu Dhabi and helps create the

committee which works with it. Commissioner Ayyub further asked for clarification on the Commission's specific role, and Chair Hasan emphasized that the Commission keeps the committee on track with its duties.

Chair Hasan further commented on the progress of the inclusion of Middle Easterners in the upcoming Disparity Study. A letter has been sent to the Secretary of GOMA, Luwanda Jenkins, and the Secretary of MDOT John Pocari. Chair Hasan will continue to follow up on the progress of the Disparity Study and further suggested creating a trade mission to the Middle East in Fall 2009.

IV. Workforce Development

Commissioner Galston has worked with Montgomery County and has been updating Special Assistant Awad on the job opportunities in the County. She has contacted and worked with the Human Resources office in Montgomery County.

Commissioner Galston spoke of the importance of Middle Eastern appointments to boards and commissions in order to facilitate more representation of the community on a state level. This is a way to not only gain representation but to also allow Middle Easterners to gain familiarity with the state government. Commissioner Galston wants to use the commission website as an outlet to make information available to the community on boards and commission vacancies. The committee wants to make appointments a priority and to help in this goal create a talent bank and ask Secretary Jeanne Hitchcock for help. Commissioner Abu-rumman suggested that we ask the community to continuously send resumes to help create the talent bank.

Commissioner Galston further wants to do comparable work with other counties outside of Montgomery County. Montgomery County provides newsletters to update the community on job openings. Special Assistant Awad was asked to follow up and research what information is available in other counties.

Chair Hasan expressed his concern about accepting resumes and stated it is the Commission's duty to provide its due diligence and look at the resumes so only the most qualified people are recommended. Chair Hasan also suggested that a leadership council should be established to help groom potential candidates for positions. Commissioner Julian Spirer expressed his concern for the Commission making recommendations because of personal relationships. It was suggested that we should make clear on the website that people applying mention they learned of the vacancy from our website. Chair Hasan emphasized that the committee should provide guidance to qualified people and emphasized the need to groom the person who has the most promise. Commissioner Spirer again expressed that the Commission should not vet for people because the Commission should be careful of recommending people due to personal relationships.

Commissioner Ayyub mentioned that there is always a risk when appointing and recommending people and that he would prefer to choose somebody he knows over somebody he does not know. Commissioner Nadia Sawaya asked if it was

permissible for the Commission to recommend individuals for paid positions. Would this be considered a conflict of interest? Chair Hasan stressed that all the Commission can do is recommend and the employers are ultimately the people who make the decisions. But, it is in the Commissions interest to have due diligence and only recommend people who are most qualified.

Commissioner Ayyub moved the conversation to discuss appointments to executive (paid) posts. He stated the goal of the committee is to help the state and find a good match from our community. Chair Hasan raised the question as to how we would prepare and groom individuals for these positions. What is the process? Before we recommend individuals they must build a resume. Commissioner Rone brought up that the Baltimore Jewish Council has a very strong leadership program. The program available at the BJC teaches youth how to use HR training to translate Jewish issues into policy. The program also allows the youth to go along for police rides and meet with officials. The goal of the program is to direct people to the areas they are most passionate for. Commissioner Rone invited Special Assistant Awad and Chair Hasan along with those commissioners interested to join a session.

Commissioner Galston stated that the workforce committee is working on two tracks. One track to enlarge the Middle Eastern American representation on boards and commissions and one track for a more labor intensive program to groom Middle Eastern Americans for executive posts.

V. Peace Zone

Chair Hasan requested that Commissioner Spirer update the Commission on the efforts towards establishing a Peace Zone in Maryland. Commissioner Spirer informed the Commission that he is currently identifying a suitable location to host the businesses and is trying to contact Prince George's County for a location. Commissioner Spirer spoke with Governor O'Malley about the idea and he seemed very responsive for it. Currently there is a lot to be done and Commissioner Spirer is building and moving forward on the initiative.

VI. Community Development

Commissioner Sawaya filled in for Commissioner Riad Dakheel as Committee Chair.

Commissioner Sawaya discussed with the group the interest of hosting a Health Care Conference in early 2009. The conference will cover issues of cultural competency, health disparities, and issues in the medical profession. Commissioner Sawaya has spoken with the Executive of the Asian Pacific American Commission, David Lee, for assistance because his commission has held a similar event recently.

The suggested budget is around \$5,000 to hold the conference.

Commissioner Sawaya has approached Sinai, a unit within Life Bridge, and they are interested in the event, but to what extent is not clear yet. The Johns Hopkins health system has also expressed interest.

Commissioner Ayyub raised the question concerning what exactly are the health issues within the community. Due to the lack of information on the Middle Eastern population it is hard to tell but Commissioner Sawaya emphasized the need for bi-lingual materials and staff, cultural/religious competency, and education on health insurance. Commissioner Sawaya also stated that the event would be large in order to allow for booths to share information and showcase services.

Commissioner Bukhari suggested that the Islamic Society of Baltimore, Muslim Community Center and other organizations would be valuable to showcase.

Commissioner Sawaya asked the Commission whether it would be more valuable to keep the conference to the Middle Eastern Commission alone or to incorporate other ethnic commissions as well. Commissioner Spirer stated that if there was sufficient interest within our own community then the Commission should keep the event inclusive.

Commissioner Sawaya moved the topic from the health conference to the upcoming U.S. Census. The Commission is working diligently to come up with ways to count our community in order to establish stronger numbers and more accurate data. Commissioner Hafeez suggested to begin sending out information on the Census to the community to get a head start. Commissioner Galston further raised the question of the potential of including questions of country of origin to help with the count. Special Assistant Awad mentioned that a representative from the Maryland Department of Planning and representative from the U.S. Census Bureau will be attending the next meeting in February to answer these questions and provide more insight on the Census.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:10 p.m.